

Planning the Future for Prehistoric Monuments

The World Heritage Site at Avebury, England



Detail of prehistoric monument at Avebury. Photo courtesy Timothy H. McCoy

The sites of Avebury and Stonehenge in southern England contain some of the most important prehistoric monuments in the world. Since

1986 their outstanding universal value has been recognised by their joint inscription as a World Heritage Site (WHS) under the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. Since 1996 English Heritage,¹ the lead body developing Management Plans for World Heritage Sites in England, has been funding the drafting of a management plan for the Avebury part of the WHS, to be published later this year.

The Avebury part of the WHS is situated on the edge of the Marlborough Downs in Wiltshire, some 30 kilometres north of Stonehenge.² It encloses an area of 22.5 square kilometres around the six key prehistoric monuments in the care of the State which form the basis of the WHS designation. These monuments are: Avebury Henge and Stone Circles; Windmill Hill; Silbury Hill; West Kennet Long Barrow; West Kennet Avenue; the Sanctuary. A key characteristic of the area is the relationship of the prehistoric monuments to later historic features, and it is evident that these monuments have exerted a considerable visual and cul-

tural influence on the surrounding landscape for almost 5,000 years.

The main challenge for the Plan is how to protect the monuments and their settings from the land use pressures of modern life. The Avebury Henge and Stone Circle is a thriving heritage tourism destination attracting in excess of 300,000 visitors a year. The central third of the area is owned and managed by the National Trust³ for the purposes of preservation. However, the rest of the WHS is in multiple ownership and is intensively farmed, with a village of 250 residents at its core. The present land use pressures on the WHS arise principally from tourism agriculture and traffic.

The Management Plan has been developed in a collaborative manner in consultation with local people and all agencies with management responsibilities in the area. Since September 1996 a great deal of research, survey, and consultation has been carried out as a basis for the development of management policies. As part of this process, a detailed landscape assessment and visitor and traffic studies have been conducted. In addition, English Heritage has developed a comprehensive database of all the cultural and environmental assets of the WHS, held within a Geographical Information System (GIS). These projects form the main building blocks of the Management Plan.

The preparation of this strategic Management Plan for the entire WHS is a significant move forward in securing the future character and quality of the Avebury landscape as a whole, which is locally cherished and internationally recognised. The Plan will provide a framework for the holistic and proactive management of the landscape, helping to ensure that the special qualities of the WHS are sustained and preserved for future generations. In particular the Plan aims to

- establish an overall vision for the long-term future of the Avebury WHS which will be widely accepted.
- explore opportunities for positive management with farmers, landowners, and other agencies

The southwest quadrant of the Avebury Henge and Stone Circle, constructed about 2500 BC. The juxtaposition of ancient monument with modern village can be seen in the background. Photo courtesy English Heritage.



which will enhance the landscape character of the WHS whilst respecting economic interests.

- provide guidance and attract widespread support which will lead to an increased understanding, respect, and care for this exceptional cultural landscape.

The Plan comprises a statement of the objectives necessary for the long term preservation of the WHS and its landscape setting, aiming to balance the interests of conservation, public access, and the interests of those who live and work in the area. The objectives are based on the identification of the values of the WHS, key management issues, and an assessment of why the WHS is sensitive and vulnerable to the pressures of modern life.

The objectives set out in the Plan fall into the following five categories: the land use and condition of the monuments and their settings; the planning and policy framework; traffic and parking management; public access and sustainability; and archeological research. The principles underlying the objectives relate to establishing the most appropriate land use and landscape setting for the monuments through monitoring impacts and the use of management agreements, traffic and visitor management, and improved understanding of the archeological remains.

The plans sets out four main overall objectives for the management of the area for the next 30 years:

- Understand and influence the long-term change in the WHS cultural landscape for the benefit of the historic environment.
- Gain recognition for Avebury as a very special place for which special treatment should be given by government departments, agencies, landowners and visitors in order to safeguard the historic environmental assets of the WHS and their setting for the benefit of succeeding generations.
- Meet Britain's obligations under the World Heritage Convention in relation to the effective management of the Avebury WHS.
- Ensure the sustainability of all uses of the WHS.

Notes

- ¹ English Heritage is the Government's statutory advisor on the conservation of England's built heritage, including archeology, and manages over 400 of the country's most important buildings and monuments.
- ² A Management Plan for the Stonehenge part of the WHS is currently in preparation but is not as advanced as the Avebury Plan.
- ³ The National Trust is the UK's largest conservation charity.

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Further information and a summary of the Management Plan can be found on the English Heritage web site: <http://www.eng-h.gov.uk>

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Ethnic History Exhibits and Public Controversy

In 1996, the Ford's Theatre National Historic Site unexpectedly joined the growing list of institutions that have come under attack for mounting "controversial" museum exhibitions. In recent years, critics have denounced a variety of exhibits, such as "The West as America" at the National Museum of American Art. "Back of the Big House," a traveling exhibit which examined the relationship between slavery and the cultural landscape of plantations, generated so much criticism at the Library of Congress that it was hastily removed from display. The unparalleled controversy that surrounded the proposed *Enola Gay* exhibit at the National Air and Space Museum has been the subject of numerous articles as well as two full-length studies.

Ford's Theatre National Historic Site became part of this growing phenomena in July 1996, when it launched a temporary exhibit entitled "Jewish Soldiers in the Civil War." A primary interpretative theme of the Ford's Theatre museum is the Civil War. In 1995, in an effort to expand the site's treatment of the conflict, the museum staff initiated a series of short-term exhibits on a variety of little-known aspects of the Civil War.

The inspiration for "Jewish Soldiers" came from a Civil War periodical which featured an article on Jewish combatants. The piece raised several intriguing points. The majority of Jews living in the United States at the start of the war had only immigrated within the preceding decade and thus were still acclimating to their new country. Second, in ratio to the total male Jewish population of